

DOING IT

MY WAY

MUMTAZ... KAL, AAJ AUR KAL

She turned the pout into a fashion statement...much before it became fashionable to, well, pout. As for the pirouette, she did it only the way she could. For a nation high on hormones, Mumu was the ultimate sensual kitten.

From a child artiste in *Gehra Daag* and *Mujhe Jeeno Do*, Mumtaz moved on to patent the stereotype of the gangster's moll in *Mere Sanam* and *Brahmachari* and then became the Rambolina of stunt flicks.

Until *Do Raaste* happened. Thereafter, she ruled the marquee with back-to-back hits like *Sacha Jhoota*, *Khilona*, *Aap Ki Kasam*, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, *Apna Desh* and *Roti* to name just a few.

At the age of 26, at the height of her dizzying stardom, she chucked it all up to become Mrs Mayur 'Moneybags' Madhvani. *Seeta Aur Geeta*, *Safar*, *Haathi Mere Saathi* were some of the super-hit films she turned her back on.

Today, at 53, after a near-fatal brush with cancer, Mumu's far removed from the madding crowd. With her hair cut severely close to the scalp, she's a far cry from the firecracker that she once embodied.

Yet, the face still has that unmistakable glow. After much cajoling, she agrees to a one-on-one. And tells it like it is:

How do you look back at terms like the first female superstar?

I'm not sure if I was one. But yes, I was loved a lot. I realised that...when cancer struck me. The amount of mail I received was unimaginable. I left the industry 27 years ago. It feels good, actually I feel overwhelmed.

Care to talk about your illness?

While I was undergoing radiation and chemotherapy for cancer, my thyroid started acting up. Although I'd overcome cancer, my health started failing rapidly. That's when a doctor in Boston discovered that my thyroid had been affected. I've recovered now, but the damage has been done. I'll have to take medicines for the rest of my life.



Why did you give it all up at 26? You could have easily gone on for a good 10 more years.

My dear, to tell you the truth, I was tired. I was doing three shifts. My private life was going nowhere. Mayur proposed to me in 1972. By '74, I was through with the movies. I got married in May that year.

Incidentally, in August that year, *Prem Kahani*, *Roti*, *Nagin* and *Aap Ki Kasam* released and were declared box office hits. But I was far far away, enjoying marital bliss.

Was it easy to turn your back on showbiz?

It was. I think every girl must get married by the time she's 30 and have kids. I was working since the age of 12. I knew I had to get out of the Filmistan Studio-Centaur-Hotel-party rut. I just had to go.

The Madhvanis were family friends ever since I was 10. But I hadn't met Mayur for years. Then in 1972, while I was holidaying in London, someone set up a meeting. We liked each other, he proposed, I said yes. But he was keen that I should quit acting.

I was more than happy to call it a day. (*Laughs*) The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Mayur loved food, I loved to cook. My sister-in-law Kalpana



Mumtaz with her family

MY MARRIAGE went through very tough times. No man can be FAITHFUL

taught me to make some of his favourite Gujarati dishes like *daal dhokli*.

You did come back in between to do *Aandhiyaan*.

Yes. My kids were in boarding school. I was a bit bored of just jet setting from one country to another. So I came to do it for a lark. I was treated in style. I think *Aandhiyaan* is one of David Dhawan's best films, even better than his *Aankhen*. But I was heart-broken when it flopped. I didn't want to do films any more. Even today Cinevista and Sony want me to do TV, some film or the other. But I don't feel like it. In any case, my health won't permit me to act anymore.

Your marriage ran into a bit of heavy weather, no?

Yes. Twelve years into my marriage, my husband was two-timing me. I don't blame the other woman at all. In fact, I feel sorry for her. My marriage went through very tough times.

My husband and I became close once again during my illness. Mayur believed that I'm immortal. My illness devastated him. One thing's for sure, no man can ever be faithful to one woman. The sooner women realise that, the faster we'll get emancipated. Let's face it, it's a man's world. If a woman were to admit that she found men other than her husband attractive, she'd be in serious trouble.

I'm sure you must have had many admirers even after marriage.

Yeah, but why get into all that? My daughters Natasha and Tania are 24 and 21 years old. Recently, we were in Delhi for the wedding of Feroz Khan's daughter

TOP OF MY CHARTS

Hum to koi bhi nahin—Shararat
Aaj kal tere mere—Brahmachari
O majhi—Bandhe Haath
Yeh hai reshmi zulfon ka—Mere Sanam
Zindagi ittefaq hai—Aadmi Aur Insaan
Khilona jaankar—Khilona
Zindagi ke safar—Aap Ki Kasam
Jai jai Shiv Shankar—Aap Ki Kasam
Paisa pheko—Dushman
Main tere ishq—Loafer
Koi shehri babu—Loafer
Le jayenge—Chor Machaye Shor

Laila. I was signing autographs when someone went up to Mayur and called him Mr Muntaz. I was quite embarrassed. But Mayur was okay. He's Mr Cool. He's become so much better-looking with age. I remember, some heroes making snide remarks when I got married, "Mumtaz ne kis mucchhad se shaadi kar li."

You teamed up with Rajesh Khanna in 10 super-hits. Your screen chemistry was incredible. Have you seen any other magical pairing?

Kya chemistry miyan? It's like this. When a husband and wife live together for years, they become attuned to each other. Since Kaka and I worked so closely, we became very comfortable with each other. I knew what his reactions would be.

You were fab in *Bindiya chamkegi* and *Jai jai Shiv Shankar*.

What did I do there? Nothing. You media guys just make heavy weather about us. Everyone is unique. Like there can never be another Shammi Kapoor or Dev Anand. I don't think there was anything outstanding about me.

Of all the film-makers I worked with, my favourites were V. Shantaram and Yash Chopra. Unfortunately, I could never work with great directors like Mehboob Khan, Guru Dutt and Hrishikesh Mukherjee.

(Laughs) In fact, in the 75 films I did, you'll be surprised by the number of *namuna* directors I worked with. But even if I knew that a director was framing a shot wrongly, I'd never tell him how to do his job.

You were the original *phataka*. Every actress from Rekha to Sridevi has acknowledged your contribution to their craft.

Really? I'm very, very flattered. My USP was my punctuality. My car would arrive at the studio sharp at 9 a.m. As for

I WAS signing autographs when someone went up to Mayur and called him MR MUMTAZ

dancing, we'd can 200 feet in one shot. Today's songs are so much easier. After eight beats, the director goes cut.

Madhuri Dixit's *Hamko aaj kal* (*Sailaab*) is so similar to my *Oh maajhi* (*Bandhe Haath*). Even Madhuri's costumes were copied from mine. Maybe that had something to do with the choreography. Saroj Khan was an assistant to Sohanlal Master who choreographed my number.

Your comments on today's actresses. Anyone as *namkeen* as you?

I'm sorry but I don't watch too many films. I like that girl, what's her name, yes Mahima Chaudhary. She was better than the heroine of *Dhadkan*. I like Kajol and Tabu, too. But my all-time favourite's Madhubala. I loved her. Now, that was real *namak*.

Which of your performances are you proud of?

I was okay, nothing great at all. I liked *Khilona* which fetched me the *Filmfare* Best Actress Award. I also liked myself in *Roop Tera Mastana*, *Aaina* and *Tere Mere Sapne*. I should have won the Best



I LIKE MAHIMA Chaudhary. She was better than the heroine of *DHADKAN*



GAUTAM RAJADHYAKSHA

Actress Award for *Tere Mere Sapne*. I really deserved it. Instead it went to Asha Parekh for *Kati Patang* in which she wore white and stood in front of a piano doing precious little. *Khair, jaane do*, god has given me so much.

I believe quite a few heroines were jealous of your success.

Somehow, I always got on better with my heroes. (*Laughs*) I never had time for the heroines. Be it Feroz Khan, Dharmendra or Jeetendra, I got along fabulously with them.

Is it true that some heroes were hesitant to work with you at one point?

Yes, ours were strange times. Since I had that label of a stunt film heroine, many heroes treated me like an outcaste. I'd signed *Sacha Jhoota*. (Producer) Vinod Doshi wanted to sign Shashi Kapoor. I was really desperate to work with an A-grade hero like him. But he said no and opted out of the film.

I was so hurt that I told Shashi at R.K. Studio, "I'll make sure that you'll work with me some day."

And I gave it back to him. When we were doing *Chor Machaye Shor*, Shashi got some eight offers to work opposite me. But I'd made up my mind to quit. He tried to charm me, saying, "Mumu darling, do some projects with me before you go." I sweetly reminded him of the past. But I hold no grudges. I'm a firm believer in karma.

You've seen so much.

Yes, I have. Emotionally I've been hurt too often. *Dushmanon ne dushmani ki hai...doston ne bhi kya kami kiya hai?* I grew up too soon. I didn't have a childhood. At 12, I was thrown into the company of adults.

Today's heroines have it much cushier.

Yeah. But everything's so synthetic. *Hamare zamane mein*, we'd enter the studio and everyone would jump out of their seats. *Aaj kal* to you see superstars dining at Olive, boogieing at discos. I mean, it's fun. *Phir bhi*. Don't mean to be disparaging, but in our times dancing at functions, doing stage-shows were considered cheap, today it's the in-thing.

Hamare zamane mein affairs *bhi tagde hote the*. Affairs lasted for years. Now, before you know it, the couple has moved on in different directions. Actually today, it's like a railway platform, every Friday a new superstar comes and goes.

Please continue.

Recently my niece told me about the wonderbra and how today's heroines were using it to look more alluring. I wondered what the fuss is all about. I'd used it 30 years ago for the *Duniya mein logon ko (Apna Desh)* number because I was wearing a low cut dress. Actually, I didn't even know what I was wearing till the last moment. Be it a film's premiere or a shoot, I'd just call Bhanu Athaiya and she'd give me something appropriate to wear.

I've got so much love from the industry. The Khan brothers Feroz and Abbas and their families are dear dear friends. I'm so glad Guddu's (Rakesh Roshan) son has made it. *Mashallah*, Hrithik's a big star. Ironically, in our times, light eyes and *chikna*-looking men were not considered hero material.

I remember Preity Zinta, before she became a star, running up to me at Shiv Sagar restaurant and saying how much she loved me. I hear she's become a big star now. I was also touched with all the love showered by Shah Rukh Khan, when he presented the *Filmfare* Lifetime Achievement Award to me. He told me he used to dance to my songs as a kid.

Lastly, describe your life in one line.

It's that song from *Aap Ki Kasam: Zindagi ke safar mein guzar jaate hai jo makaam, woh phir nahin aate.... woh phir nahin aate*.

Jitesh Pillai